

**Choosing the Best Post  
Secondary Institution for**

**You.**





## Choosing the Best Post Secondary Institution for You.

Every course is different and every institute is different. To top it off, each student wants different things!

To address this, we've created this guidebook to help you decide which type of environment you will thrive in. Finding a perfect institutional match can be a challenge despite the wide range of courses and diverse schools available. It starts with deciding what is most important to you.

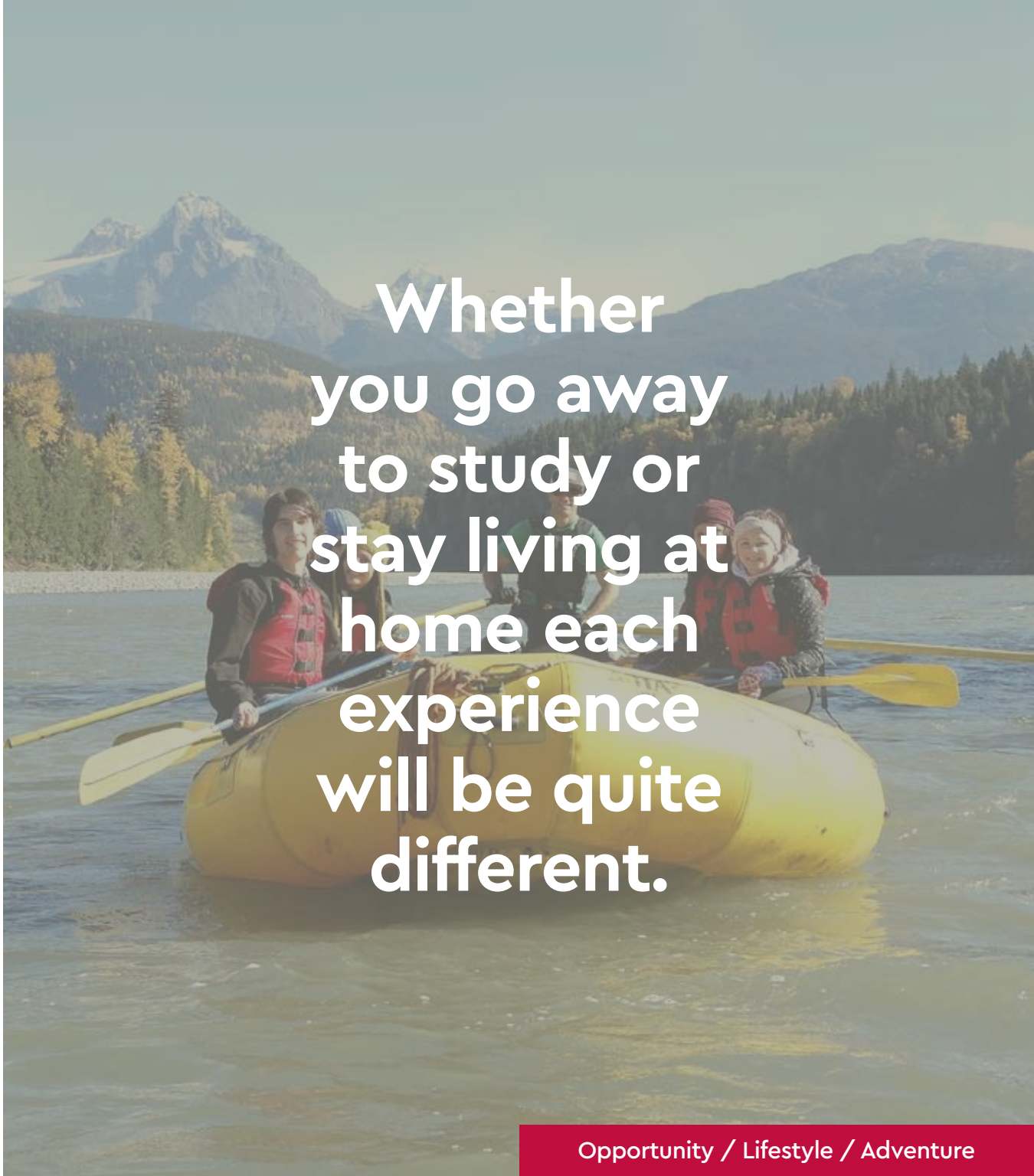
The wrong program choice is the top reason why students drop out of college or university in the first year. So it's critically important to choose the right program for you; not for your parents, not for your friends, but for you. If you do, you'll join the 93% of students who are still in higher education and thriving after their first year.



## Questions to Consider:

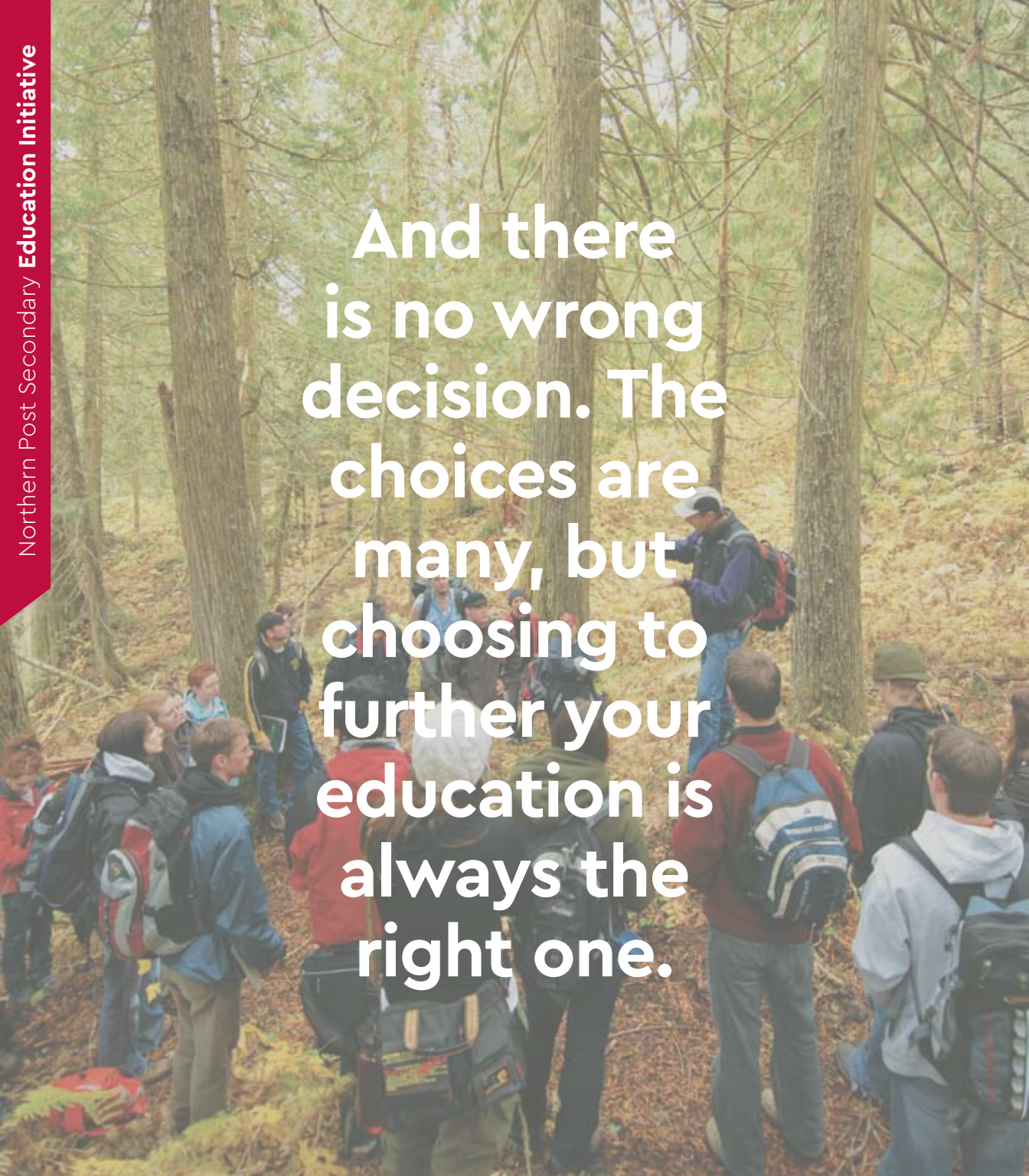
- 01.** Is it important for you to be close to your family?
- 02.** Do you want to visit your boyfriend or girlfriend every weekend (or, perhaps, want an excuse not to)?
- 03.** How much does program cost matter to you?
- 04.** What do you want your off campus and on campus experience to be like?
- 05.** Are small class sizes, hands-on learning opportunities and field schools important to you, or do you prefer in classroom learning?

Whatever your answers are, location is likely to be an important factor in your decision. If you want to live at home, the decision might be straightforward. If you live in or near a major city, there are likely many local universities you could choose from. If you want to go away from home, then distance and travel time will be a factor.

A group of people are in a yellow inflatable raft on a river. They are wearing life jackets and holding paddles. The background shows a forested riverbank and mountains under a clear sky.

Whether  
you go away  
to study or  
stay living at  
home each  
experience  
will be quite  
different.



A group of students with backpacks are standing in a forest, listening to an instructor. The text is overlaid on the image.

And there is no wrong decision. The choices are many, but choosing to further your education is always the right one.

- 01.** Going away to study may give you a greater sense of freedom than staying at home. Living away from your family and the town where you currently live may make your life less restrictive.
- 02.** Relocating away from home means that you will be free to study and socialize when you like.
- 03.** Moving away from home will probably be more expensive. If you're considering this option, have you discussed financial arrangements with your family? This may require that you need to get a part-time job. Not a bad thing either.
- 04.** To live happily away from home will require much more self-reliance, as well as a need to take responsibility for shopping and cooking for yourself. Home does offer some emotional security and leaving is a big decision. However, living on your own is a great way to start the transition into adulthood.

Staying close to home to study for your first two years is an option to help reduce the overall cost of your education. BC has the most comprehensive credit transfer system in the country, allowing students to move easily between institutions and retain credit towards degree completion. Student Outcomes studies show that students who complete their first two years at a college in or near their community and move on for degree completion have the same or better outcomes of students who remain at the same institution throughout their studies.

### **Moving away from home may also improve your graduate employability.**

- 01.** Graduate employment research has shown that students who leave home develop self-sufficiency sooner and therefore have better job prospects than those who stay with family.
- 02.** Students who live away from home learn more about the practicalities of day-to-day living, such as household chores, which help them develop useful life skills.
- 03.** These life skills of self-sufficiency are very transferable into the workplace.

### **Some 'local' students choose to experience the best of both worlds.**

- 01.** They choose a post secondary institution 50 kilometres or less from home, live on campus for the first year (experiencing post secondary life to the full, making friends and developing networks) and then have the option of moving back home in subsequent years. This is increasingly common.
- 02.** Students who choose a co-op or internship sometimes opt for work closer to home or vice versa to save money or experience living away from home.
- 03.** Courses involving international study are available to students whether they have lived at home or moved away.



# Looking at a Specific Location?

If a particular town or city interests you, it's best to look at the location of the post secondary institutes you are interested in.

- 01.** Is the campus location city-centre or several kilometres outside?
- 02.** City-centre locations will be handy for amenities and night-life but may be noisier and less picturesque.
- 03.** Locations outside the city may be located in a beautiful setting but if you have to live off-campus, there could be high travel costs and restricted access late on Sunday evenings.
- 04.** Don't forget that most larger cities have more than one post secondary institute.

Smaller communities and campuses in economic diverse regions often have advantageous graduate-to-job placement ratios. This is due to less competition among graduates, and can sometimes lead to accelerated career opportunities in communities where industry has a high demand for graduates and skilled workers.







**The town or city facilities might be a priority for you.**

- 01.** Your time at a post secondary institute will be an opportunity for you to pursue your interests in a way you may never be able to again.
- 02.** Access to many things, such as sports facilities could be very cheap and you will probably have some time to become seriously involved if you wish.
- 03.** Whether you like to dance the night away, follow the NHL, attend the theatre, or engage in volunteering, choosing the right location will help to fulfill your dreams and aspirations.

**Then, of course, there is the cost.**

Generally, the south of BC and Vancouver are more expensive places to live than the rest of the BC, so if cost is significant for you, do take this into account.

A bus card will be a very sensible long-term investment.

# What Sort of Post Secondary Institute Do You Want To Go To?

As you might expect, post secondary institutes are not all the same.

- 01.** At one end of the spectrum is the University of Northern British Columbia, a leader in research which offers traditional academic courses. Most students achieve a Bachelor's degree, and there are also larger numbers of postgraduates and international students.
- 02.** At the end of the spectrum is a very locally-oriented college which provides vocational courses to a higher percentage of students from the local area, many of whom are mature (over 21 years old) and looking for a clear path to a defined career.
- 03.** Or somewhere in the middle is a college with university transfer credits. Students can undertake two years of study in a more intimate environment, and then move on to any university to complete their undergraduate degrees.

Most post secondary institutes are very good at what they do.

- 01.** Each will offer a different student experience.
- 02.** Think about what is right for you.

## University or College?

Generally, universities will do more research, recruit a higher proportion of high school students and offer more traditional academic courses. Colleges typically will be more locally and vocationally-oriented and recruit more mature and part-time students. Most colleges offer transfer credits for completed courses that can be applied to university degree programs.





The right program for you is a greater priority than the campus where you will study. Institutes vary greatly in size, from fewer than 1,000 students to over 10,000.

- 01.** A smaller institute will have smaller class sizes, might be perceived as more personal and cosier, and may have more facilities to go around. Conversely, it also may have slightly fewer facilities and non-academic activities available.
- 02.** A university will be busier and may feel more impersonal. For example, lectures may be delivered to hundreds of students at a time. There may also be a lot more activities taking place.



# The Facilities

**The facilities offered by universities are fairly similar to one another.**

All universities will have a library, a sports centre, a health service, and a career service for example. If there is something that is particularly important for you, it is worth researching before you apply. Create a spreadsheet with a list of key facilities that are important to you and build your own facilities checklist.

**Accommodation will be important if you are moving away from home.**

- 01.** Is there an accommodation guarantee for first-year students? What about later years? What are the conditions and deadlines of the guarantee?
- 02.** If you are an avid on-line gamer, you will want to know if the rooms have broadband or wireless access and whether there is a cost attached.
- 03.** If you are often out late socializing, you may want to know where the accommodation is located so you and your family can be reassured that you can safely return home late at night.
- 03.** If you are unable to live in university accommodation for the duration of your program, find out where alternate accommodation is located – check out the surrounding amenities, like shops, nightclubs and laundromats. Will you feel safe there late at night?







If you have a particular speciality interest you would like to pursue while studying, then this could be a decision-making factor.

- 01.** Most post secondary institutions will have sports facilities of some sort, as well as clubs, societies and students' unions.
- 02.** More specialized activities like climbing walls or an ultimate frisbee society may be harder to find depending on your location.
- 03.** The students' union will be able to tell you about sport and leisure facilities.

**Students' Unions have always been an important aspect of student life.**

- 01.** They have evolved from the traditional image of providers of cheap beer and student protests.
- 02.** The modern student union will have a wide range of services from food and school supplies to comprehensive advice services.
- 03.** Increasingly, they are providers of part-time employment for students and are becoming involved in personal skills development.
- 04.** Some are more active and innovative than others, so they are worth exploring in depth.

**Most post secondary institutions have employment agencies or job-boards on campus.**

- 01.** These are generally located in the career services or Students' Union buildings. The agencies use their contacts with employers to help to identify suitable employment opportunities for students.
- 02.** The agencies will also help ensure that pay rate and work hours are reasonable and within statutory guidelines.
- 03.** If you think you may become short of cash, a good employment agency of this type could be vital to your financial stability.

**If you have any special needs, do take the time to ensure that your needs will be catered for by the institutions that you are applying to.**

- 01.** All campus will have a comprehensive understanding of special needs requirements.
- 02.** Some facilities with newer buildings make accessibility much easier while others with older buildings might make accessibility more challenging.
- 03.** If in doubt, don't hesitate to ask.

Be sure you find the institution that you feel will support you in having the best student experience possible.





# The Cost

**Cost will always be a factor in the decision-making process.**

How much will your program cost you? Figure this out by the semester or by the month, as well as for the entire length of the program. Understand your long term expenses. EducationPlannerBC provides information on tuition costs as well as some of the additional student fees.

**Costs can vary greatly due to:**

**Program choice** – some institutions and programs have higher fees than others. Compare the cost of tuition not only between institutions but also programs.

**Co-op** – programs with co-op options may cost less because during your co-op semester you will earn a wage that can be used to offset tuition.

**Class format** – courses that have labs in addition to lectures, or programs that are taught using a hands-on or simulation format may have higher tuition costs.

**Learn to Save Money – Post-Secondary Can be Expensive**

Do your research and save where you can. Save money and time by planning ahead.

[SEE MORE](#)

Save the stress for studying!

**Universities have introduced bursary/scholarship schemes to assist students who are from low-income backgrounds.**

In order to find out how much it will cost to study at a particular institute, you will have to check their fees and your potential eligibility for any of their bursary programs.

[LEARN MORE](#)

about bursaries and scholarships available to students studying in BC.

Even then, this may not give you the full picture, as costs vary across institutions. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- 01.** If you wish to be thorough, ask your admissions contact how much it will cost for you to join the sports centre, connect to WiFi, use the library photocopier, or bring your family to your graduation ceremony.
- 02.** Many institutions supply this type of detail in their syllabus and on their website.

In summary, don't underestimate the costs associated with post-secondary education. Do lots of research, and ask as many questions as you need to get a clear idea of how much schooling will cost you. And don't forget to budget for your social life too!





# Making the Decision

## Compile a shortlist of possible post secondary institutions.

- 01.** For some, location will be critical and this will immediately narrow down the choice.
- 02.** Others may be keen to go to a prestigious or high-ranking institution and then have to consider whether they can meet the entry requirements.
- 03.** For most, it is a combination of factors such as these that will result in the elimination of most institutions from your list, so that a manageable list will emerge. Then the detailed work begins.

The first sources of information will be the undergraduate brochure website and app.

- 01.** These are the main recruiting documents that universities produce and should include most of what you will need to know, such as details of courses, facilities and entry requirements.
- 03.** Brochures and websites are not always impartial; they are designed by the marketing and advertising department to make the university seem attractive. The sun is always shining in brochure photographs.
- 04.** Good quality brochures and websites will give you a feel for a post secondary institution's priorities. But remember, nothing replaces a face-to-face visit.
- 05.** The website will generally have the most up-to-date course choice and financial details.
- 06.** The institute's website might give you the chance to take a virtual tour of the university. Departments will usually have their own sites and you can often access student handbooks for more in-depth details about courses, options, teaching methods and assessment.

Another easy way of obtaining a pile of brochures and departmental booklets is to visit a higher education convention where most post secondary institutions will have a booth to give out information and answer questions. You may also get an opportunity to ask specific questions to a representative from the institute.

**A personal visit to the campus you are considering is essential.**

- 01.** You can get a feel for the atmosphere of a place and find out just how far you will have to walk between the lecture theatres and the students' union when the weather is poor.
- 02.** Don't forget that open house days are designed to make you want to apply and so you should be critical of what you see and hear, just like when you read a brochure and look at the website.
- 03.** If you are unable to make the date of the Open House, some departments might make arrangements for you to visit more informally at another time.

While going through all these sources of information, you will no doubt talk to friends, parents, teachers, careers advisers and anyone else who comes within range.

- 01.** While it is good to talk, times have changed. For example, a parent or teacher may have some relevant experience, but it might be from 20 or 30 years ago. Post secondary institutions have changed a lot since then.
- 02.** Go and see for yourself.







### **Checklist** – choosing a place to further your education

- 01.** Which institutions offer your chosen program?
- 02.** Where are they ranked?
- 03.** How far away from home do you want to go?
- 04.** Which facilities are important to you?
- 05.** Have you looked at the website?
- 05.** Have you gotten a copy of the brochure?
- 06.** Is there an Open House you can attend?
- 07.** What are the costs of attending?
- 08.** Is the library open 24 hours a day? How far is it from your accommodation?
- 09.** Does the institute cater to your hobbies or interests?
- 10.** What are the career prospects like?
- 11.** Is there a culture of students participating in internships, or study abroad programs, if that is important to you?
- 12.** What is the campus like – consider location, travel costs, nearby amenities, for example?

## Alternatives to Full-Time Study

Whether it's time, money, or any other potential challenge, full-time study isn't always the best option for those looking to earn a degree. If you're facing this problem, don't worry; there are plenty of other ways to earn a degree.

Alternatives to full-time study aren't just restricted to recent high school graduates.

### These alternatives can also benefit:

- 01.** Mature people going back to school.
- 02.** People who were unsuccessful in being accepted into full-time study.
- 03.** People who simply decided to take a break and not attend university right away.

## Studying Part-Time

Many full-time degree courses can also be undertaken part-time, allowing you to fit your study around other commitments.

Financial arrangements for part-time courses are different to those for full-time study and you should contact the relevant funding body for your area to establish what financial help may be available.

You should also contact the university or college directly to find out about vacancies, entry requirements and to discuss fees and funding.





## In Conclusion

When choosing a post-secondary institution, it's important to pick the best one for your needs. After you've decided on the program you want to go into, the next step is deciding among the schools that offer it. Some may be larger institutions, like universities, while others may be smaller colleges. Both have their benefits; which is right for **You?**

In addition, you'll need to decide whether you are willing to move away from home or not. In either case, you will have to consider tuition costs and school fees, as well as the cost of living. School facilities, activity choices, and students' unions also all contribute to quality of life on campus; decide which are important to you, and do your research to find institutions that have them. Finally, don't miss the step of physically going to the school if you can, or checking out a virtual tour if you are far away. Seek out a student adviser and ask enough questions to get a clear picture of what each school can offer you.

**It's your education!**

**So make it work for you to get the best student experience possible.**